



TURTLE ISLAND ANNUAL ACTIVITY REPORT 2024



Turtle Island's mission is protecting the world's most endangered & overlooked turtle and tortoise species.



Turtle Island Annual Activity Report 2024

Together We Thrive: Year of Community Engagement and Collective Success

TURTLE ISLAND, recognized in Austria as a scientific institution and a Category A Zoo, led by the internationally renowned scientist **Dr. Peter Praschag**, aims to breed endangered turtle species worldwide. With over **300 species** (out of approximately 360 known species) and more than **3,000 individuals**, Turtle Island is the world's most species-rich conservation breeding center.

Our long-term goal is to return these captive-bred specimens to their countries of origin. This is only possible through **targeted awareness campaigns** and **long-term financial support** for the breeding station in Graz (Austria). **Species conservation, environmental protection, animal welfare, research, conservation breeding, biodiversity protection, and education** comprised the core of our daily work in 2024. One of the biggest challenges continues to be the **financial burden** we face daily to ensure the **sustainable security** of our animal population and the further development of breeding projects.

In 2024, we explored new avenues in our efforts to address financial responsibility.

The Blue Buck – Festival for Biodiversity and Cultural Diversity

In **October 2024**, the **Turtle Festival, “The Blue Buck,”** was held over three weekends at **Spielfeld Castle in Styria, Austria**. Under the leadership of Turtle Island founder **Dr. Peter Praschag**, the event celebrated **biodiversity and cultural diversity** while raising funds for Turtle Island's crucial species conservation projects.

The exhibition combined **art with conservation topics**, attracting numerous visitors and raising awareness of the threats many turtle species face. In addition to artistic works, **scientific insights and Turtle Island’s ongoing conservation projects** were presented.

<https://turtle-island.org/de/ausstellung-spielfeld-okt-2024>



A special highlight was the **artwork of internationally renowned Styrian painter Gerald Brettschuh**, who created several new pieces specifically for the exhibition, including the **title painting "The Blue Buck."** His large-format, expressive paintings dealt impressively with themes such as **nature, myth, transformation, and human primal behavior.** Brettschuh's contributions added a strong artistic dimension to the exhibition, encouraging reflection on the relationship between humans and nature on both an emotional and symbolic level.



Special emphasis was placed on a **cross-border cultural exchange between Styria and Slovenia**. Over **500 posters** were placed on both sides of the border to **raise awareness** of biodiversity and encourage participation in the festival. In the evenings, **Styrian and Slovenian musicians and artists** performed, receiving enthusiastic responses from the audience.

A video featuring the highlights of the opening weekend

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F20y3JPBpOU>) was shared online, impressively capturing the unique atmosphere of the event. Local media also reported positively on the festival.

<https://www.facebook.com/turtle.island.international/posts/pfbid02aGQCm3LeBtKGDkW5GPRCfMayBAL6V6fVpGfE1fUUK1JtioN1MsZQcfV3ZkYJBeH4l>

Charity-Event für Schildkrötenstation

Die weltweit aktive Organisation „Turtle Island“ mit Sitz in der Steiermark gibt ein Festival mit Musik, Kunst und Kleintierschau auf Schloss Spielfeld.

Von Alexandra Kofler

Mehr als 3000 Tiere und über 300 Arten werden von der weltweit größten und artenreichsten Schildkrötenstation „Turtle Island“ mit Sitz in der Steiermark betreut. In den 1960er-Jahren lernte Rainer Praschag die Grundsteine, später stiegen sein Sohn Peter Praschag und dessen Frau Shannon DiRuzzo ein und bauten auf dem Familienanwesen die weltweit viel beachtete Schildkrötensammlung auf.

Die Station wurde zum Pionier in Sachen Haltung und Zucht bedrohter Arten. Der Grazer Peter Praschag steht heute als Biologe und Zoologe hinter „Turtle Island“, welches mittlerweile über ein weltweites Netzwerk verfügt. Eine der Stationen befindet sich in Bad Schwanberg, wo seltene Schildkrötenarten und zwei Alligatoren ein Zuhause gefunden haben.

Weil für den weltweiten Einsatz zum Erhalt der Schildkröten viel Unterstützung und Geld



Peter Praschag und das Team von „Turtle Island“ laden zum großen Charity-Festival auf Schloss Spielfeld.

Charity-Event

Kunst, Kulinarik, Kleintierschau und Musikveranstaltungen am Abend (Electric, Indie, Rock) warten auf kleine und große Besucher.
Ort: Schloss Spielfeld, Spielfeld 1, 8471 Spielfeld
Datum: 19. und 20. 25. und 26. Oktober, jeweils 14 bis 18 Uhr
Eintritt: freiwillige Spende zugunsten von Turtle Island
Vortrag: von Peter Praschag am Freitag, 18. Oktober, um 18 Uhr
Kleintierschau: am Samstag, 19. Oktober, ab 10 Uhr
Weitere Informationen unter www.turtle-island.org/de/ausstellung-spielfeld-okt-2024/

benötigt wird, lädt „Turtle Island“ nun mit Kunst, Kultur, Musik, Kulinarik und einer Kleintierschau zum ersten großen Charity-Festival ins Schloss Spielfeld. Am Freitag wurde das Event feierlich eröffnet, an den kommenden beiden Wochenenden können Klein und Groß in die Welt der Schildkröten eintauchen.

Unter dem Motto „Der Blaue Bock“ dreht sich dabei alles um eine ausgestorbene Tierart und die Rettung bedrohter Tiere. Der „Blaue Bock“ ist eine afrikanische Antilopenart, die um 1800

von Europäern im Zuge der Kolonialisierung Südafrikas ausgerottet wurde. Als Mahnmal für Artenschutz und kulturelle Vielfalt steht er im Mittelpunkt des mehrtägigen Charity-Festivals, dessen Spenden der steirischen Tierschutzorganisation zugutekommen.

Mit Gerald Brettschuh konnte dafür ein namhafter regionaler Künstler gewonnen werden. Er hat dafür unter anderem seine eigenen Interpretationen des „Blauen Bocks“ in Form mehrerer überdimensionaler Gemäldeschaffen, die bei der Einführungsveranstaltung erstmals

zu sehen waren. Daneben warten in den Räumen des malerischen Renaissanceschlusses noch viele weitere Kunstwerke und Kuriositäten mit spannenden Geschichten auf das Publikum. Unter anderem Ethnische Kunstobjekte aus der Sammlung von Peter Heindl, sieben Aquarien mit Schildkröten und einem Lungenfisch, Installationen von Alexandra Gschiel und Till Ipsier sowie eine historische Jagdtrophäensammlung aus dem einstigen Besitz von Kronprinz Rudolf.

Mit letzterer hat es eine besondere Bewand. Sie enthält

nämlich auch einen Vorderschädel eines „Blauen Bocks“ und kam um 1900 über Maribor in den Besitz von Friedrich Hubmann aus Groß St. Florian. Später erbte Enkelin Rosa „Pipi“ Wagner die Sammlung. Sie schrieb ab den 1970er-Jahren mit dem ersten südsteirischen Nobel Buschenschank im Ehrenhausener Georgschloss regionale Gastronomiegeschichte. Rund zwanzig Jahre lang waren die Jagdtrophäen als Leihgabe im Jagdmuseum Schloss Stainz. Nun hat Rosa „Pipi“ Wagner sie als Spende der Tierschutzorganisation „Turtle Island“ ver-

macht. Zum gesamten Netzwerk der Tierschutzorganisation gehören heute wissenschaftliche Einrichtungen und Universitäten weltweit. Dazu Tierschutz, Forschungs- und Auswilderungsprojekte in China, Nepal, Türkei, Mexiko, Sudan, Uganda, Südostasien oder Bangladesch.

Die Mission hinter allem: Gemeinsam bedrohte Arten retten, Lebensräume bewahren und Zukunftsräume für Natur und Mensch schaffen. Das langfristige Ziel der Organisation ist eine öffentlich zugängliche Schildkröten-Station.

Despite Location Issues – Breeding Success Continues

Our locations continued to be renovated and optimized. We are still urgently searching for a suitable property to begin planning the new facility.

Despite these uncertainties, we expanded the **species diversity** of our turtle population and created **new breeding and housing structures**. A particularly exciting success was the breeding of the **Indian Peacock Softshell Turtle (*Nilssonia hurum*)**, a species that, worldwide, has only been successfully bred at **Turtle Island**—a **significant achievement for global species conservation**.

In 2024, we were able to breed 475 turtles from 72 different species. Due to reduced financial resources and the significantly increased costs, it was no longer possible to continue breeding as many species. Therefore, in 2024, we focused more on species with smaller clutch sizes or fewer eggs, as well as those species that are the most threatened. This focus led to lower breeding numbers, as the reproduction and incubation of such species is particularly complex, resulting in a lower reproduction rate. At the same time, we were able to acquire valuable knowledge that will help us bring breeding back to a higher level in the coming years – provided we manage to cover the increasing costs.

For years, Turtle Island has regularly achieved impressive breeding successes – the highest award an institution can receive, clearly confirming the project's success and the responsible use of funding.

Cooperation with Local Businesses and Partners in Graz/Austria

Another important aspect of our work in 2024 was the collaboration with local businesses and partners in Graz. Through these partnerships, we were able to make our merchandising products accessible to a wider audience, including our popular Turtle Island 2025 desk calendar and coffee mugs, with a variety of designs.

The products were sold in selected local stores, generating not only income to support our conservation projects but also further raising awareness of our mission.

These partnerships are an important step towards the sustainable financing of our activities and allow us to raise more funds for the protection of endangered turtles for the long term.

<https://www.facebook.com/turtle.island.international/posts/pfbid0osLT3a5ozsHgTTLsxcuGBT3hhVaiKY5LFB38eyKUJtooWLDfyJvobdsf9GHkmrn9l>

Particularly pleasing was the support from ice tea Makava, our partner for "Der Blaue Bock" (The Blue Buck) Festival. With their sustainable corporate philosophy and commitment to environmental issues, they were a perfect match with the goals of our event.

<https://www.facebook.com/turtle.island.international/posts/pfbid0iAyWdGNTgovMw3vMEyJebw4pFsTn34WKHWr1Bm8ERNWKaeRUbChREPE81eiZduHUI>

We also strive to collaborate with other companies and organizations at the national and international level, such as the "Laufen macht glücklich" (Running makes you happy) event, the Lucky Reptile, or Tierarzt24.de, which supported us with food donations.

<https://www.facebook.com/turtle.island.international/posts/pfbid02K3eyYspLB8ZpePbFhDZoxVzn742phthdKo1NQavJyr6x183wAxqjhE4KQzn5noWcl>

<https://www.facebook.com/turtle.island.international/posts/pfbid0Xiy7SfM4Kajy4niHGcsrbZaozbKstpJMXhx1cZHUEbbMi1rN9qsYY3rKqycpNYqhl>

<https://www.facebook.com/turtle.island.international/posts/pfbid08JPni5oEs9SPYsFsW7Pz2YY7krXLbVJts4UWLMSpePB33gWdaqVQAsvwQyRb8wxl>

Media Presence in 2024

In 2024, Turtle Island was able to raise awareness of its conservation work through a strong media presence. Our successes and activities were featured in several newspaper articles, TV segments, and radio reports.

One notable highlight was a media focus (radio, print) on the 50th birthday of Peter Praschag, the founder of Turtle Island, which provided an in-depth insight into our mission and current projects.

<https://www.facebook.com/turtle.island.international/posts/pfbid02jyhwGQGAiWkjMii8VqasmGfLEAVPN2p4WP6wtSaXPfwkNZAbiBGU61YfjdQinusol>

<https://www.facebook.com/turtle.island.international/posts/pfbid0252365fZGLidmpHVBUs14pxLp7p3ecibXABXbMgiDQMVWkt9S84N34BbCcFi9K9NI>

Television journalists also reported multiple times about our breeding program and our commitment to conservation: For example, the PM Wissen (Science) series on Servus TV (private Austrian TV station) produced a detailed segment on the special language of turtles.

https://www.servustv.com/wissen/v/aaca3lx5ttveht7j73dm/?fbclid=IwY2xjawJNNMNleHRuA2FibQixMAABHReKsbhLrxuaq_wcj97Tovd6vBBPMEus7pGFzcWOdQqzmSJr-APpAw71hg_aem_9mAzXQHVcpDzJ5iTjgFDLg

The Austrian Public Broadcaster ORF chronicled the special story of the Cochin forest cane turtle (*Vijayachelys sylvatica*).

<https://www.facebook.com/turtle.island.international/videos/1214109926220140/>

In addition to coverage in traditional media, we gained significant attention through our monthly newsletter, which is published in both German and English, as well as in social media. Our posts were widely shared, reaching a broad (international) audience.

A special highlight was the participation of Dr. Peter Praschag and Dr. Shannon DiRuzzo at EarthX in Dallas, one of the world's largest environmental events. They each presented to an international audience, introducing Turtle Island's mission to protect endangered turtles and the "Turtle Island Token." The digital token, developed in close collaboration with Turtle Island, offers a new way to fund nature and species conservation: By purchasing a token, the survival of a turtle at Turtle Island can be secured for a specified duration. This concept also meets the EU Taxonomy regulations under the Green Deal, providing companies with a sustainable way to invest in environmental and conservation projects. The presentation was very well received, was broadcast on EarthX TV, and significantly contributed to strengthening the global networking and awareness of our mission.

Additionally, Dr. DiRuzzo participated in the 'Conservation Connection Podcast,' where she discussed the crucial role of Turtle Island in global species conservation. She shared her long-term experience, the changes in conservation efforts, and the challenges organizations like Turtle Island face in preserving the biodiversity of our planet.

Another highlight was the panel discussion on the fisheries and aquaculture policy in Mexico, in which Shannon and Peter took part. They presented the Puerto Vallarta, Mexico project, which focuses on protecting the world's smallest turtle, the Vallarta mud turtle (*Kinosternon vogti*).

On a regional level, we were able to make an important contribution to raising awareness. Jana Grabner read from her children's non-fiction book *Swim, Little Emys!*, which was created in collaboration with Turtle Island. The reading was well received by children and parents, emphasizing the importance of early awareness for species conservation. Jana was supported on-site by our long-time animal caretaker, Lisa Marschnig. Such events help us bring the topic of biodiversity closer to a young audience in a creative and engaging way.

<https://www.facebook.com/turtle.island.international/posts/pfbid02k9yMFTCyz3wfn0HEF5Rkiwf5sEiSc9osP8X1JcRQt1JoKyoZqLtpzxa7p4bdaxnvl>

Unfortunately, in 2024 we were unable to continue our educational work as usual, due to a lack of financial resources. Completed educational and knowledge-sharing concepts are ready to be implemented, but their funding has not yet been secured.

The media attention, however, has also repeatedly led to the question of whether Turtle Island can be visited – and if not, why not? The answer lies in the current structure of our locations: A visit would only be possible if we could finally find a sufficiently large plot of land in the greater Graz area and begin the planned consolidation of our four locations.

This would not only create a much-needed visitor area but would also enable us to offer more educational programs for school classes and interested individuals. The blueprint and concepts for this project have been developed and are just awaiting implementation.

However, the availability of suitable property, strong commitment and financial support from the EU, the federal government, state, city, and the private sector are crucial.

Our Two Most Important Species Conservation Projects Outside Austria

Kinosternon Vogti – Mexico



The Vallarta mud turtle (*Kinosternon Vogti*) was only scientifically described as recently as 2018 and is one of the rarest turtle species in the world. It lives exclusively in a small area near Puerto Vallarta on the Pacific coast of Mexico. Its habitat is increasingly being destroyed by tourism, development, and agriculture. Since 2021, Turtle Island has been working with local partner organizations to conserve this species.

The project includes:

- Population monitoring and habitat mapping
- Protection and purchase of suitable habitats
- Establishment of a breeding and research center in Mexico (completed in 2025)
- Successful captive breeding and establishment of an assurance colony in Austria
- Planned reintroduction and habitat restoration
- International cooperation and training of local teams

In 2024, more than 60 turtles were successfully relocated to the newly built conservation center in Mexico. Following a security breach in early 2025, the facility was fully upgraded and finalized. Meanwhile, Turtle Island's secure assurance colony in Graz continues to achieve regular breeding successes, safeguarding the species' genetic diversity. The goal remains the same: to reintroduce and preserve *Kinosternon vogti* in its native habitat for the long term.

Eiselt's Marsh Turtle – Turkey/Syria



Emys orbicularis eiselti is a highly endangered subspecies of the European pond turtle that is found exclusively in south-western Turkey. It is considered the most endangered turtle species in Europe. It faces severe threats from habitat destruction, pollution, illegal dumping, and increasing pressure from urbanization and industrial development mostly associated with tourism. The devastating earthquake of 2023 further impacted its fragile habitat.

Since 2022, Turtle Island has been working with Turkish conservationists, scientists, and local politicians to preserve this unique subspecies. Turtle Island cares for the only breeding group in the world, whose offspring will be released back into the wild.

The project includes:

- Field research to locate and monitor the last wild turtles
- Habitat protection, land acquisition, and restoration efforts
- Long-term monitoring programs
- Scientific cooperation with local authorities and NGOs

The aim is to save *Emys orbicularis eiselti* from extinction and to permanently secure its habitat - both locally in Turkey and through breeding and protection measures in Austria. Recent fieldwork confirmed a surviving population, offering new hope.

With local partners, Turtle Island is now actively advancing initiatives to protect and restore the turtle's natural habitats and to build a safety net through captive breeding in Austria.

Advanced Education, Training, and Research Support is an Important Priority

Although we only have limited financial resources, it is very important to us to support students and scientific work in the field of species conservation. We are also committed to educating and raising awareness among the next generation.

In 2024, we welcomed several holiday interns to Turtle Island, giving them in-depth insights into species conservation, animal welfare, and the threat to endangered species. During their internship, they received practical training and were able to actively participate in care and research. Increased financial support would enable us to further expand such educational opportunities and offer even more young people this valuable experience.

An outstanding example of our research support is a bachelor thesis, prepared by Elena Gaumberger, an employee of Turtle Island, who is conducting a scientific study as part of her Bachelor of Science in Biology. Elena, who works as an animal keeper, in tandem with her studies, focuses her research on the European pond turtle (*Emys orbicularis*), the only turtle species native to Austria. Her findings will also be incorporated into our planned reintroduction project in the Mura border region of Styria/Slovenia. Elena's commitment not only contributes to scientific knowledge but also underscores the importance of protecting both native and internationally endangered turtle species. We are very proud of her research and grateful for her commitment!

Unfortunately, we were unable to continue with other educational projects in 2024, as we lacked sufficient financial resources. Academic texts, projects and learning materials are prepared and ready to incorporate into a learning environment; only funding is needed.






Next year, we will be able to report on the **Styrian/Slovenian species conservation project** for the **reintroduction of the European pond turtle!**

Conclusion

Despite significant financial challenges and limited resources, Turtle Island is the world's most species-rich conservation breeding stations, amplifying their skillful conservation management.

IMAGINE what Turtle Island could achieve for biodiversity and species conservation with secured funding.

Comparison of the "Big Five" Conservation Breeding Stations

					
	Turtle Island	Turtle Survival Alliance	Turtle Conservancy	International Center	KFBG
	Graz	USA	USA	Germany	Hong Kong
Number of Species (Total 362 species)	Over 300	26	32	11	20
Species from the Top 50 Endangered Species	37	22	16	11	6
Number of Species in the 2 Critical Genera <i>Cuora</i> & <i>Batagur</i> (19 species total)	17	13	7	7	2
Number of Animals of <i>Cuora</i> & <i>Batagur</i>	950	200	55	200	350
Total Number of Turtles	3,100	600	550	225	600

To continue our work, we urgently need support from political organizations, businesses, and private donors. Although private donations have increased, they are not commensurate with the sharp rise in energy costs and cuts in funding, which have exacerbated Turtle Island's financial situation. This increasingly threatens the continuation of our species conservation efforts.

With the necessary commitment from federal, state, and local governments, as well as long-term partnerships with businesses, it is possible to maintain Turtle Island as a global leading center for the protection of endangered turtles and tortoises. Our goal is to continue as a flagship project for global species conservation in the future. We are fully committed to this goal; **however, we cannot do it alone!**

